

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A physical device placement system for servicing requests for placement information, comprising:

a machine information database containing machine information for a plurality of uniquely identified computers operated by customers of a computer manufacturer; and

a configuration system in communication with the machine information database and configured to:

receive a configuration request from an authorized user for placement information of a specified hardware device in a particular computer having representative machine information in the machine information database, wherein at least one type of authorized user is each of a plurality of customers of a computer manufacturer operating a computer represented in the machine information database; and

respond with the placement information.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein each of a plurality of customers is registered with an operator of the physical device placement system.

3. The system of claim 1, further comprising:

a network connection between the configuration system and an internet, wherein the configuration system receives the requests for placement information from the internet; and

a configuration information database accessible by the configuration system and containing configuration information specifying placement of a plurality of hardware devices in computer systems.

4. The system of claim 1, wherein the configuration system maintains a network connection with the Internet and receives the requests for placement information therefrom.

5. The system of claim 1, wherein the machine information database contains machine reported information for the plurality of uniquely identified computers.

6. The system of claim 1, further comprising a purchase order database containing a plurality of purchase orders each containing a machine type descriptor and a serial number.
7. The system of claim 1, further comprising a configuration information database accessible by the configuration system and containing configuration information specifying placement of a plurality of hardware devices in computer systems.
8. The system of claim 7, wherein configuration system is configured to generate the placement information by combining the configuration information and the machine information applicable to the specified hardware device and the particular computer.
9. The system of claim 7, wherein the configuration system comprises:
 - a first server configured for establishing a first network connection with a plurality of client machines each configured to transmit requests for placement information to the first server;
 - a second server having a second network connection with the first server;
 - an access partition between the first server and the second server and configured to restrict information flow from the first sever to the second server; and
 - a physical device placement server in communication with the configuration information database and the machine information database.
10. The system of claim 9, wherein the access partition comprises a firewall.
11. The system of claim 1, further comprising a security system configured to restrict access to the configuration system to requests for placement information submitted by authorized users from an external network.
12. The system of claim 11, wherein the external network is the Internet.
13. The system of claim 11, further comprising a plurality of internal client machines having a network connection with the configuration system, wherein the network connection bypasses the security system and wherein the configuration system is

further configured to process requests for placement information from the plurality of internal client machines.

14. A physical device placement system for servicing requests for placement information, comprising:

- a machine information database containing machine information for a plurality of uniquely identified computers operated by customers of a computer manufacturer;

- a configuration information database containing configuration information specifying placement of a plurality of hardware devices in computer systems

- a configuration system in communication with the machine information database and the configuration information database and configured to:

 - receive a configuration request from an authorized user for placement information of a specified hardware device in a particular computer having representative machine information in the machine information database, wherein at least one type of authorized user is each registered customer of a computer manufacturer operating a computer represented in the machine information database;

 - generate the placement information by combining the configuration information and the machine information applicable to the specified hardware device and the particular computer; and

 - respond with the placement information;

- a first network connection between the configuration system and an internet, wherein the configuration system receives the requests for placement information from the internet;

- a security system configured to restrict access to the configuration system to requests for placement information submitted by authorized users from the internet; and

- a second network connection between the configuration system and a plurality of internal client machines, wherein the second network connection bypasses the security system and wherein the configuration system is further configured to process requests for placement information from the plurality of internal client machines.

15. The system of claim 14, wherein the machine information database contains machine reported information for the plurality of uniquely identified computers.

16. The system of claim 14, further comprising a purchase order database containing a plurality of purchase orders each containing a machine type descriptor and a serial number.

17. The system of claim 14, wherein the configuration system comprises:

an internal server configured for establishing a third network connection with an external server, wherein the external server is configured to establish a fourth network connection with a plurality of external client machines; and wherein the security system comprises a firewall between the internal server and the external server and is configured to restrict information flow from the internal server and the external server; and

a physical device placement server in communication with the internal server, the configuration information database and the machine information database.

18. The system of claim 17, wherein the configuration system further comprises an interface server connected to the internal server and the physical device placement server and configured to host a plurality of graphical user interfaces for display only to authorized users.

19. A method of servicing requests for physical device placement information, comprising:

receiving, at a physical device placement system, a configuration request from an authorized user for placement information of a specified hardware device in a particular computer having representative machine information in a machine information database, wherein at least one type of authorized user is each customer of a computer manufacturer operating a computer represented in the machine information database;

generating the placement information; and

responding with the placement information.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein another type of authorized user comprises one of a sales person and a field engineer of the computer manufacturer.

21. The method of claim 19, wherein receiving the configuration request comprises receiving the configuration request via the Internet.

22. The method of claim 19, wherein receiving the configuration request comprises receiving the configuration request from one of an internal client computer and an external client computer.

23. The method of claim 19, wherein generating the placement information comprises retrieving machine information specific to the particular computer and retrieving configuration information specifying placement of the specified hardware device in the particular computer.

24. The method of claim 23, wherein generating the placement information further comprises combining the configuration information and the machine information.

25. The method of claim 23, wherein the machine information is reported by the particular computer.

26. The method of claim 19, wherein generating the placement information comprises:

retrieving a purchase order comprising a machine type descriptor and a serial number for the particular computer;

retrieving machine information specific to the particular computer using machine type descriptor and a serial number; and

combining the machine information and configuration information that specifies placement of the specified hardware device in the particular computer.

27. The method of claim 19, further comprising authenticating the authorized user before generating the placement information.